

STAP Working Group on Technological Surprise  
Highlights of Meeting on 4 September 1985

1. Meeting. The STAP Working Group on Technological Surprise met on 4 September 1985 in Room 7E62, Headquarters. Dr. Julian C. Nall, NIO/S&T, served as meeting coordinator; all members attended. [redacted]

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2. Agenda. [redacted]

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3. Discussion and observations. Significant comments pertained mostly to procedural and structural devices to lessen the likelihood of technological surprise and encourage varying hypotheses among analysts. One method [redacted]

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4. At the heart of these suggestions was a common recognition of the need to get a sufficient range of opinions, no matter what issue is being addressed. An analogy was drawn to the publication of articles within the scientific community. What is needed is a means to get theories out and thereby raise the threshold of exclusions. The suggestions underscore the critical role of communication and the need to exchange information. [redacted]

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5. The discussions also highlighted the need to distinguish among the various types of surprises. For example, there are "operational" surprises and there are "technological" surprises. There are surprises rooted in a misreading of available data, and there are surprises rooted in a dearth of available data. Some surprises may be traced to resistance to unconventional opinions, while others can be attributed to inadequate organizational structures (which may foster inertness). [redacted]

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6. Discussion of the list of surprises led to a consensus on the need to look retrospectively at several such events to discover procedural keys to prevention. It was suggested that the list could be culled and then divided into categories; individual events or cases could then be characterized with emphasis on the process of discovery and validation, and attention paid to the elements that distinguish between alternative interpretations. Other important points to cover concern whether or not the event was an intelligence failure (or lapse), its consequences, and a determination whether or not it should have altered our collective mind-set. [redacted]

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7. Future Meetings. The next meeting (16 October) will focus on NIE [redacted] as background for vulnerability discussions. A meeting on 2 December will reprise the history questions discussed above. A third meeting (date uncertain) will focus on procedural questions, which should lead to a draft report. [redacted]

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